

# Suspected Russia-trained spy whale reappears off Sweden's coast

**Beluga whale was first spotted in Norway wearing a harness marked 'Equipment St Petersburg' in 2019**

*AFP in Stockholm*

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A beluga whale that turned up in Norway wearing a harness in 2019, prompting [speculation it was a spy trained by the Russian navy](#), has reappeared off Sweden's coast.

First discovered in Norway's far northern region of Finnmark, the whale spent more than three years slowly moving down the top half of the Norwegian coastline, before suddenly speeding up in recent months to cover the second half and move on to [Sweden](#).

On Sunday, he was observed in Hunnebostrand, off Sweden's south-western coast.

"We don't know why he has sped up so fast right now," said Sebastian Strand, a marine biologist with the OneWhale organisation, adding that it was particularly puzzling because the whale was moving "very quickly away from his natural environment".

"It could be hormones driving him to find a mate. Or it could be loneliness, as belugas are a very social species – it could be that he's searching for other beluga whales."

Strand said the whale, believed to be 13-14 years old, is "at an age where his hormones are very high".

The closest population of belugas is located in the Svalbard archipelago, which lies midway between the northern coast of Norway and the north pole.

The whale is not believed to have seen a single other beluga since arriving in Norway in April 2019.

Norwegians nicknamed him Hvaldimir – a pun on whale in Norwegian, *hval*, and a nod to its alleged association with [Russia](#).

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When the whale first appeared in the Norwegian Arctic, marine biologists from the Norwegian directorate of fisheries removed a human-made harness from him.

The harness had a mount suited for an action camera [and the words Equipment St Petersburg](#) printed on the plastic clasps.

Directorate officials said Hvaldimir may have escaped an enclosure, and may have been trained by the Russian navy, as he appeared to be accustomed to humans.

Moscow never issued any official reaction to Norwegian speculation he could be a “Russian spy”.

The Barents Sea is a strategic geopolitical area where western and Russian submarine movements are monitored.

It is also the gateway to the Northern Sea Route, which shortens maritime journeys between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

Strand said the whale’s health “seemed to be very good” in recent years, and it had been foraging wild fish under Norway’s salmon farms.

But his organisation was concerned about Hvaldimir’s ability to find food in Sweden, and has already observed some weight loss.

Beluga whales, which can reach a size of about six metres (20ft) and live to between 40 and 60 years, generally inhabit the icy waters around Greenland, northern Norway and Russia